



Department of Justice

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FORMER HIDALGO COUNTY DETENTION OFFICER CONVICTED OF RECEIVING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

[MCALLEN, TX] – Francisco Cantu, a former Hidalgo County Detention Officer, has been convicted of receiving child pornography, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

Cantu, 33, of Edinburg, TX, pled guilty to the federal felony offense at a hearing today before United States District Judge Ricardo H. Hinojosa, admitting that he purchased a membership to a child pornography website in early 2005, and after accessing the website, downloaded images and videos of child pornography onto his home computer. A forensic examination of Cantu's computer and external storage media, which was seized from his home in October 2006 by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, found more than 3,500 still images and more than 60 video clips of child pornography. The still images and video clips depicted adults engaged in various sexual acts with children, who largely ranged in age from four to 10 years old with several images involving children less than two years of age. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has identified numerous known child victims within Cantu's child pornography collection.

Cantu faces a maximum statutory punishment of twenty years in prison, and a lifetime term of supervised release following release from prison at sentencing. Ordered held in federal custody without bond since his arrest in October 2006 Cantu will remain in federal custody pending a sentencing hearing before Judge Hinojosa set for July 27, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.

This case was investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Alex C. Lewis and Juan F. Alanis.

This case is being brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse, launched in February 2006 by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. Led by the United States Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov/.

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